

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-14

WASHINGTON POST
18 October 1984

'Pacification' Official Backs Westmoreland

Knowledge of 'Conspiracy' Denied

By Eleanor Randolph
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NEW YORK, Oct. 17—Former ambassador Robert W. Komer, who has described himself as a "four-star" civilian in Vietnam under Gen. William C. Westmoreland, said today that he knew of no "conspiracy" among other high-command officials to suppress information on enemy troop strength 17 years ago.

In his second day of testimony for Westmoreland in the retired Army general's \$120 million libel suit against CBS Inc., Komer also said he knew of no pressure from Westmoreland or "anyone else" to put a "ceiling" on enemy troop figures relayed from Westmoreland's command in Vietnam to Washington in late 1967.

At issue is whether Westmoreland was libeled by the CBS documentary "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception" in January 1982.

The program charged a "conspiracy" at the highest levels of American military intelligence" to suppress estimates of an increasing enemy buildup. Westmoreland's command imposed a ceiling on such reports in the year before the communists' massive Tet offensive in January 1968, CBS said.

That surprise attack on virtually every major front in South Vietnam became a turning point in public support of the war as the media, the public and even President Lyndon B. Johnson were shocked by the strength of the offensive at a time they were being told that the communists were running out of troops, the documentary said.

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In this early period of the trial, Westmoreland's lawyer, Dan M. Burt, is expected to present powerful figures from the Vietnam era who have said they support the general's view that CBS converted a "good-faith debate" between CIA and Army intelligence analysts into a "conspiracy" by Westmoreland to hide troop data from the president.

CBS lawyer David Boies, who may not begin his defense for at least six weeks, tried to show in cross-examining Komer that Komer would not have been part of any effort to suppress troop-strength numbers in the late summer and early fall of 1967.

Komer acknowledged under questioning that, as civilian head of Johnson's Vietnam "pacification" program from May 1967 to November 1968, he was not present at meetings in 1967 when so-called self-defense, or "home guard," troops were removed from official estimates of enemy troop strength.

Boies, comparing Army intelligence documents in May 1967 with a joint Army-CIA document in November of that year, also tried to show that military intelligence analysts shaved numbers of troops from other categories to provide a lower official total of overall strength.

Komer, a lively witness whose long answers often included acerbic jokes, managed at one point to draw a laugh from the normally reserved Westmoreland.

Asked by Burt about Saigon meetings on the Weekly Intelligence Estimate Update, Komer began describing the amphitheater in which top military officials gathered at a round table.

"Does it have an apex?" Burt asked of the table.

"Does a circle have an apex?" Komer asked, smiling slightly. "I'm afraid you are beyond me, Mr. Burt."

Then he added, "Actually, the apex was where Gen. Westmoreland sat."